

Our Navy and our Marine Corps, uniquely, provide presence – around the globe, around the clock – ensuring stability, deterring adversaries, and providing the nation’s leaders with options in times of crisis. We are “America’s Away Team” because Sailors and Marines, equally in times of peace and war, are not just in the right place at the right time, but in the right place all the time. There is no next best thing to being there. In every case, from high-end combat to irregular warfare to disaster relief, our naval assets get on station faster, we stay longer, we bring what we need with us, and we can act without having to ask anyone’s permission because our ships are sovereign U.S. territory.

To get that presence requires grey hulls on the horizon. So we've reversed the decline in shipbuilding and the attrition of aircraft that began in 2001. In the seven years before I took office, the Navy contracted for 41 ships. In the seven years since 2009, we've contracted for 85 ships, and we've done so while increasing aircraft purchases by 35% - aircraft like the F-35B, which the Marine Corps brought to initial operating capability last year. We are also investing in the re-capitalization of every naval aviation platform, and we are doing all of this with a smaller top line. Our efforts, with the support of Congress, have put our naval air force on the path to recovery, and they guarantee that we will reach 300 ships by 2019 and our assessed need of 308 ships by 2021.

One of my most important responsibilities is to name these ships. Each ship class pays tribute to a person, a place, or a battle. In the past few months, I have named destroyers after Medal of Honor recipients Colonel Barney Barnum and Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone, Marines who proved themselves in the crucible of combat. This afternoon I'll have the privilege of naming a destroyer after another Marine Corps hero, Lieutenant General Frank E Petersen, Jr. I've also recently named ships for civil rights leaders, Americans who fought, and in some cases died, for the ideals we cherish most as a nation: justice, equality, freedom. Today we will name a big deck amphib – a type of ship many of you are intimately familiar with.

Today, we honor the Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors and Marines who fought in the South Pacific in World War Two in the Bougainville Campaign. It was a critical battle that secured our Australian allies from continued Japanese attacks and gave us bases from which to further attack and achieve our Victory in the Pacific. In a way, the Bougainville Campaign was also a preview of future military operations – joint, multi-service, and multi-national. But more importantly, Bougainville is where the Navy-Marine Corps team further refined the art of amphibious warfare and again proved their worth to the Nation. It was our youth, just like most of you here today, that stepped up to stand against tyranny and aggression. Of the five Medals of Honor earned at Bougainville, four were awarded to Marines – proof of the courage and conviction of our Marines. We carry that example with us – YOU carry the fighting spirit of the Sailors and Marines of Bougainville with you.

The Battle of Bougainville itself will be personified in this new amphibious ship as it will carry both amphibious craft and aircraft to take the fight to the enemy, whenever and where ever we need to.

We are building more and more ships, and as we do, we assign them a sponsor to represent the values of the namesake of the ship. A sponsor imbues a ship with her spirit and her personality. She remains in communication with that ship for its lifetime. Every time a new captain comes aboard, one of the first things that captain does is call the sponsor. I'm happy to announce Ellyn Dunford as the sponsor of our Navy's newest amphibious assault ship.

The Landing Helicopter Assault ship that Ellyn sponsors will represent the fighting spirit and valor shown by the Sailors and Marines who fought in that campaign – ensuring victory in the Pacific and final victory against those who would seek to do us harm. I am privileged to announce the name of LHA 8, USS Bougainville.